

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

CENTER FOR CANCER RESEARCH

77 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

May 22, 1975

Dr. Fred Ikle
United States Arms Control
and Disarmament Agency
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Dr. Ikle:

I am writing to you on behalf of the American members of the "Organizing Committee for an International Conference on Recombinant DNA Molecules", a committee of the Assembly of Life Sciences of the National Research Council.

It has become evident recently that a new technique of molecular biology, the ability to construct recombinant DNA molecules, could allow the design of new biological agents combining characteristics from different organisms. The potential for creation of new agents of biological warfare is inherent in this technology. At the recent Conference on Recombinant DNA Molecules in Asilomar, California, this question was not discussed because we were more concerned about the potential public health consequences of current research using this methodology.

Now that the Asilomar Conference is behind us, we have become concerned whether existing International treaties cover the use of modern techniques of biology to design new weapons of war. Specifically, we wish to know if the Biological Weapons Convention is relevant. Because the Convention appears to ban any developmental work on biological weapons, it would seem to ban use of recombinant DNA technology for such purposes. I refer to Article I which says:

Each State Party to this Convention undertakes never in any circumstances to develop...microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes;

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My question to you is whether it would be United States policy that Article I prohibits production of recombinant DNA molecules for purposes of constructing biological weapons. I also wonder whether you would see any reason why other signatories would not interpret the Convention in a similar fashion.

For your information the names and addresses of the other American members of the Committee are given below:

Dr. Paul Berg, Department of Biochemistry, Stanford University, School of Medicine, Stanford, California
(Chairman of the Committee)

Dr. Maxine Singer, Laboratory of Biochemistry, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland 20014.

Dr. Richard Roblin, Infectious Disease Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Mass.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Baltimore", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Baltimore
American Cancer Society
Professor of Microbiology

DB/mts